

Passion for God – Passion for the young
Perpetual profession Sr Kelly Ryan, FMA
Hos 2,16.21-22; Ph 3,8-14; Jn 15, 9-17

My dear brothers and sisters:

We are here gathered together to celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist, the memorial of a love that Jesus brought to its highest limit, and the sacrament of communion that transforms us and makes us sharers in his own life, so much so that we are no longer ourselves but rather He who lives in us.

The Eucharist urges us to become authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. It serves as the foundation, model, and goal of the consecrated life, that is called to shape every religious in the image of Christ to the point of having his mind and his heart. (cf. Phil 2,5)

The perpetual profession of the evangelical life that you are making, dear Sr Kelly, is indeed a religious act, but it is filled with incredible anthropological weight similar to what matrimony has, precisely because here we are dealing with love. The text of the first reading, taken from the book of the Prophet Hosea, is more than ever eloquent and inspired: “Thus says the Lord: I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart”. With your perpetual religious profession, you are not professing primarily a doctrine, or a code of ethics, or a liturgy, but you are making a profession of love, or better still, I would say, you are confessing that you are loved. You believe that you are loved by Love itself, who never disappoints, as Saint Pauls says: “I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord”. From this love gushes forth a form of life like that of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, entirely centered on God, lived in community, at the service of the young.

Attempting to capture the deeper meaning of our religious life, I take as starting point this Eucharistic celebration and the Word of God that we have heard. I share with you some reflections that can help you to reaffirm your decision to respond with generosity and joy to the Father who calls you to follow his Son, to model your life on his, sustained and guided as you are by the Spirit just as Mary was.

Before anything else, it should be clear to you that to make the perpetual profession of FMA consecrated life means to take upon yourself the public commitment of following Christ always in the footsteps of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. This means to consider your live as God’s project for you and to take the Gospel as the sole norm of life. Certainly, there can be other valid motives to be religious, on condition that the most important, the most decisive, the most powerful is Christ.

In fact, we do not become consecrated people on *to do* some things, though they may be very good, attractive, and even dazzlingly bright. We become SDBs or FMAs *because of Someone* who has loved us first, has fixed his gaze on us, has conquered us, has invited us to follow him, has asked us to collaborate with him, and has sent us his very own Spirit.

This we do through a public profession in perpetuity, to show that it is the most conscious, the most mature, and the most demanding act that a believer can do. To place everything and everyone in second place in relation to God and his Christ in order to follow him closely: this is the act that sets us truly free to give ourselves to God in the others.

Therefore, you have nothing to wonder at if the life of a Salesian Sister is seen as a project of life completely centered on God, directed towards giving him the first place rightly his, you who live in earnest as person marked by Christ and sealed with his Spirit, but also carrying in your body his passion, as a sign and stigmata, the fruit of our unconditional dedication to God and to the young.

Your mission is very clear Sr Kelly: to be sign of God and bearer of his love to the young, especially the poor and needy. This means to live as person completely consecrated to God and totally vowed to the young.

Therefore, yours is the task of continuing the work of Christ in this world, at the service of the young as Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello did. The young expect you to continue in earnest the saving work of Christ.

John tells us that Jesus said clearly to the Twelve: *“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you”* to be his friends and therefore to live in intimacy with Him; *“to go and bear fruit that will remain”*, therefore to love as He loved; and to be joyful *“I want my joy be in you and in you reaches the fullness”*. These are the three inseparable dimensions of Salesian life: consecration, communion and mission that Mother Mazzarello harmoniously united in one project of life: *consecrated to God in community for the salvation of the young*.

This is the grace of unity which we need very badly to be faithful to God who chose us to be worthy of faith in front of the young to whom we are sent.

In fact, just as spirituality without theology becomes spiritualism, and theology without spirituality becomes ideology, so also the primacy of God, the passion for God, without the presence in the midst of the young, without the compassion for them, becomes idolatry. Likewise, the passion for the young without the passion for God becomes philanthropy.

To be with Christ means to be truly face to face with him, quenching one's thirst with his word, as Mary did as she sat at his feet, without all Martha's feverish anxiety. To be with Christ means to place nothing between self and Christ, nothing that would interest us more than He. To be with Christ means to establish with him such a friendship that would generate in us the desire to talk of him with the young. This should be our mission.

Therefore, even if we are sent, that is, if we reach out to others in the name of Christ, we are not at all detached from him. Rather, the more we are united to him, the more we feel the overwhelming need to speak of him, to preach him, to

announce that he is the center of the life of every person, that he is the center of human history.

Indeed, speaking to Religious on World Youth Day, Pope Francis said a couple of days ago:

"I hope that we can become, together with young people, bold in embracing God's dream and in finding ways for a joyful, generous and transforming participation, for the Church and for humanity.

To do this, however, we also need to make choices. I would like to indicate three, inspired by the Gospel.

A first choice, set sail.

To throw the nets back into the sea, we need to leave the shores of disappointments and immobility, distance ourselves from that sweetish sadness and ironic cynicism that assail us in the face of difficulties. It must be done to pass from defeatism to faith, like Simon who, despite having toiled all night in vain, says: "*At your word I will let down the nets*" (Lk 5:5). But, to trust the Lord and his Word every day, words are not enough, much prayer is needed. Only in adoration, only before the Lord do we find the taste and passion for evangelization, for proclaiming the Kingdom. Then the temptation to carry on a "pastoral ministry of nostalgia and regrets" is overcome and one has the courage to put out into the deep, without ideologies and without worldliness, animated by a single desire: that the Gospel reaches everyone... We too are called to immerse our nets in the time we live, to dialogue with everyone, to make the Gospel understandable, even if to do so we may risk some storms... But we are not afraid to face the open sea, because in the midst of the storm and contrary winds Jesus comes to meet us and says: "Courage, it's me, don't be afraid!" (Mt 14:27)".

A second choice: carry forward pastoral care together.

In the text, Jesus entrusts Peter with the task of putting out into the deep, but then speaks in the plural, saying "throw down your nets" (Lk 5:4): Peter guides the boat, but everyone is on the boat and everyone is called to let down networks. And when they catch a large quantity of fish, they don't think they can do it alone, they don't manage the gift as private possession and property but, the Gospel says, "*they waved to their companions in the other boat to come and help them*" (Lk 5, 7). So they filled two boats, not one. One means solitude, closure, a claim to self-sufficiency, two means relationship. The Church is synodal, it is communion, mutual aid, a common journey... On the boat of the Church there must be room for everyone: all the baptized are called to board it and to let down the nets, committing themselves personally to proclaiming the Gospel. It is a great challenge, especially in contexts in which priests and consecrated persons are tired because, while pastoral needs increase, they are less and less. However, we can look at this situation as an opportunity to involve the laity with fraternal enthusiasm and healthy pastoral creativity. The networks of the first disciples, then, become an image of the Church, which is a human, spiritual and pastoral "network of relationships". All together – priests, men and women religious and lay faithful – as a Church, never without others, without the world. Without worldliness, but not

without the world. Here is the Church which, with God's help, we are called to build!

Finally, *the third choice: to become fishers of men.*

Jesus entrusts to the disciples the mission of putting out into the deep sea of the world. Often, in Scripture, the sea is associated with the place of evil and adverse powers that men are unable to dominate. Therefore, fishing people and pulling them out of the water means helping them get back to where they sunk from, saving them from the evil that risks drowning them, resurrecting them from all forms of death. Indeed, the Gospel is a proclamation of life in the sea of death, of freedom in the whirlpools of slavery, of light in the abyss of darkness. As St. Ambrose affirms, "the tools of apostolic fishing are like nets: in fact the nets do not kill those caught in them, but keep them alive, they draw them from the abyss to the light" (Exp. Luc. IV, 68- 79). c

This then is what the young expect of you, dear Sr Kelly: a truly spiritual woman, on fire with love for God and filled with the passion of the "*Da mihi animas*" for the young.

May Our Lady Mary Help of Christians be your mother and teacher in this wonderful evangelical and salesian life project of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians that you want to make your own forever.

Fr. Pascual Chávez V., SDB

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